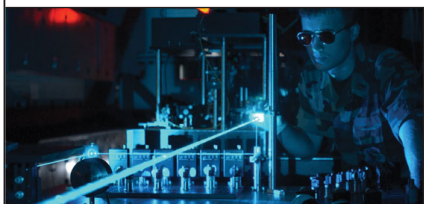




Recommendations Toward Strengthening the Dayton Region Priority Development and Advocacy Committee (PDAC) Process

A report by
The Priority Development Review Committee

March 15, 2010



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Introduction

Given our rich history of innovation, it is not surprising that the Dayton region would develop one of the first and best processes for establishing regional priorities for federal funding. The Priority Development and Advocacy Committee (PDAC), a group led by the Dayton Development Coalition (DDC), was created as a coordinated government and industry effort to advocate on behalf of the region. The roots of the PDAC process can be traced back to 1994 and the Miami Valley Economic Development Coalition.

Recently, Congressman Michael Turner, with the support of the Dayton Development Coalition and the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce, requested a community review of the PDAC process as well as recommendations to enhance the process' effectiveness. As a result, the Priority Development Review Committee (the Review Committee) was established to conduct the review. Community members were selected based on long-standing service to the community, their awareness of, but not necessarily involvement with, the current PDAC process, and their contributions to the advancement of the Dayton region.

Through a series of one-on-one interviews, open meetings, and workshops, the Review Committee confirmed that our PDAC process is unique, effective, and a point of pride for our region. The Review Committee also discovered several opportunities to improve the PDAC process. The recommendations contained herein would not have been possible without the selfless cooperation of many in our community. Individuals representing the region, review panelists, elected officials, and PDAC members provided thoughtful, constructive insight into the process. We thank them for their cooperation and their ideas.

Although the recommendations in this report are directed to the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee, the Review Committee recognizes that all the participants in the process, including project sponsors and beneficiaries have a responsibility, to ensure the success of the process. Participants must be prepared to take responsibility for their role in the process: to complete forms fully and accurately, to ask questions to resolve uncertainties, and to follow up when more information is required.

The Review Committee would like to thank Congressman Turner for his support throughout the process. Jim Leftwich, President and CEO of the Dayton Development Coalition, its Board Chair, John Landess, and PDAC chair, Mark Thompson worked cooperatively with the Review Committee to ensure our recommendations were useful and substantive. Michael Gessel and Kelly Geers, representatives of the Coalition directly involved in the process, contributed time to brief the Review Committee about the current process.

Finally, the Committee would like to thank Michael Wiehe from Congressman Turner's office and Robert J. Sweeney from Wright State University for providing staff support. The Review Committee enjoyed the opportunity to serve and report recommendations on the PDAC process.

Review Committee Charge

The Review Committee was empanelled for the purpose of undertaking a community review of the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee process.

The focus areas were:

1. Increasing transparency and community participation in the project selection process;
2. Increasing accountability of the funding recipient;
3. Instituting mechanisms for advocacy and validation of project requests.

Review Committee

Ms. Marni Flagel, Chair

Mr. William Gillispie, Vice Chair

Mr. Jerry Brunswick

Mayor Judy Cook

Mr. Larry Janning

Ms. Mary Sue Kessler

Mr. Bill Schneider

Mr. Don Vermillion

For readers unfamiliar with the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee Process, please see Appendix A.

Review Committee Process

Empanelled in September, the Review Committee met every two to three weeks to accomplish this review. The process began with the generation of a list of approximately 80 names of individuals who were asked to participate in an interview either in person or over the telephone. The interview questions consisted of the following:

1. Please give me your impressions of the current PDAC process.
2. What, if any, would you say are the strengths of the current process?
3. What ideas or suggestions do you have to improve the process?
4. What is your perception of conflict of interest in the PDAC process?
5. Could you recommend people we should speak with who are familiar with the process and who might be able to provide additional insights for our review?

In October, and while the interviews were being conducted, the Review Committee held an open meeting with elected officials from across the region. Attending this meeting were commissioners representing Greene County, Miami County, and Montgomery County and representatives of the City of Dayton and the City of Springfield.

In November the project Review Panelists were invited to participate in a workshop at Wright State University to provide input into this process. Approximately 25 panelists attended the workshop. The panelists were asked to discuss their participation in the review panels; the timing, accuracy, and usefulness of the information; accountability of the process; the effectiveness of the PDAC process in fostering regional economic development; and their role as an advocate for the selected priority projects.

Overall Impressions

In general, the individuals who participated in various input opportunities:

- were positive toward the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee process;
- felt there was a sense that through the PDAC process, we speak with one voice for the region and effectively present regional priorities to our elected officials; and
- believed the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee created a structured process that leverages the region's resources by providing an opportunity for a breadth of projects to be heard.

The Committee received comments from participants that the process was too complicated and asked that it be simplified. The Committee notes, however, that the underlying Congressional appropriations processes are extremely complicated. For example, each House and Senate member must follow the rules of their respective body while each appropriations subcommittee in the House and Senate may create an additional set of requirements. While the Committee would hope that the PDAC process can be as simple as possible, the Committee recognizes that any system conforming to the complexities of the Congressional appropriations processes will be inherently complicated.

Although the PDAC process is held in high regard by the majority of people who were interviewed, there were instances of criticism of the process. Through discussions with the interview participants and debate among the Review Committee members, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen the PDAC process with an emphasis on increasing transparency and community participation, increasing accountability of the recipients of federal funds, and instituting mechanisms for advocacy and validation of project requests. Some of the recommendations address general concerns, are designed to avoid problems in the future, or suggest best practices. In these cases, there was no particular incident or lapse on the part of the PDAC or the Review Panels. Likewise, in some cases, the PDAC is performing satisfactorily; however, the Committee formulated recommendations it believed would make the process more successful.

Recommendations

1. Review Panel Participation in PDAC Process

A major portion of reported concerns related to the functioning of the seven Review Panels. A common refrain during discussions with current review panel members was, “How did I get selected to be a panel member?” And “What is the role of review panel members?” A common theme during discussions with former review panel members was, “Why was I dropped from the review panel?” There does not seem to be consensus among panelists about why someone is chair, how long will they be chair, or what the term commitments are for Panelists. As a result of our discussions, we submit the following recommendations:

- a) There should be uniform guidelines for selection and length of service and Panelists’ terms should be staggered so that in any year, the majority of the Panelists are incumbents.
- b) The chair of each Review Panel should be an active member of the PDAC.
- c) The chair has the primary responsibility for selecting the panelists; however, s/he should be given specific guidance in creating each year’s panel. Guidance should include an emphasis on diversity: gender, ethnicity, and geography as well as technical expertise and objectivity.
- d) The PDAC should confirm each Review Panel after understanding who is on the panel, why s/he was selected, and whom s/he represents. An important criterion for selection should be, does s/he communicate to his/her broader constituency?

2. Communications/Outreach

At the core of every recommendation for improvement to the PDAC process is communication. Every participant must understand how the process works. The objective of any communications effort should be that the information is understood, not that the information is made available.

It is important that responsibility for managing the process and managing information dissemination be clearly defined. Fulfilling these responsibilities and communicating results would ensure an understanding of:

- the rationale and method for selection of participants at all levels;
- the requirements for participation as a submitting organization;
- how to seek participation in the process; and
- the rationale for project selection or rejection.

Specific suggestions for accomplishing this include:

- a) For the process to be most effective, ownership must reside with a single entity: the PDAC.
- b) Continual reference to the specific criteria established by PDAC will foster an environment of transparency and accountability. The specific criteria can be found in Appendix B.
- c) Michael Gessel's orientation presentation should be available on DVD and on a web site. The information provided by Mr. Gessel is both thorough and complete. It is not clear that every organization that submits has participated in an education session.
- d) Feedback to submitting organizations, panelists, and the PDAC itself, is critical for improvement. A continuous feedback loop would make the process more effective and more successful.

3. Transparency/Openness

The importance of transparency and openness in the process is primary. The acceptance of the process as one designed to ensure the economic revitalization of our region will be supported if the community understands the process, believes in its value, and endorses its leadership.

The simple truth is that there are many more worthy projects than there are dollars for support. As a result, choices have to be made. And those choices will, in fact, reflect a certain amount of subjectivity. While subjectivity cannot be avoided, it should be minimized.

At the review panel level, the feedback to the PDAC and to the submitting organization should be an objective review of how each criterion is met. The Review Panel should report how that determination was made. To provide greater openness and transparency, the following additional recommendations are provided:

- a) The PDAC and Review Panel should evaluate project criteria annually to ensure they accurately reflect the priorities and needs of the community. Any criteria revisions should be made public.
- b) How a project fits the PDAC's criteria should be discussed within the proposal of the organization submitting the project.
- c) How that same project is objectively perceived by the evaluators should be communicated back to the originators.
- d) The review panels should be advisory to the PDAC and provide an objective assessment to allow the PDAC to make informed decisions.
- e) The submission process is a barrier to entry. The more complicated the process is perceived to be, the less likely organizations are to participate. Simplify the process.

- f) Make the review and feedback phases available electronically as are the other process phases.
- g) The review of proposals will be most effective if the reviewers are knowledgeable of the region's priorities, the funding process, and the specific project. This expertise could place a reviewer in the situation of discussing a proposal in which the reviewer has vested interest. In addition, guidelines for the PDAC should ensure that membership in or support for the Dayton Development Coalition or any of the organizations coordinating the review panels or other organizations involved does not enhance or determine recommendations for federal funding. No participant in the process reported any conflict related to this recommendation. However, as a general policy, implementation of this recommendation may reduce concerns if the question is raised in the future.

4. Project Rankings

The projects are reviewed and prioritized by the review panels, the PDAC, the Dayton Region Leaders Forum (DRLF), and the PDAC again, depending on what happens with the DRLF review. Admittedly, tradeoffs occur as the list narrows. Great care should be taken to ensure that the subjective narrowing process happens only once—the review panels provide an objective priority list leaving subjectivity to the PDAC and the DRLF.

As the PDAC redoubles its efforts to enhance the community's confidence with the process, its efforts are complicated when output from the review panels differ widely. It appears some panels rank projects where others offer the status of acceptable/unacceptable. Suggestions for improvement include:

- a) Criteria should be clearly defined, articulated, and employed throughout the evaluation.
- b) All projects should be given a rank order priority and not grouped into categories such as acceptable and unacceptable. Rankings from the Review Panels need to be shared with those submitting projects as well as an explanation for the ranking.
- c) To the extent possible, the Review Panels should follow a consistent process. Lack of consistency can be viewed as a lack of transparency or openness.

5. Education and Advocacy

Every year the Dayton Development Coalition, along with 75 to 100 industry leaders, fly to Washington D.C. as a show of unity and support for the region's prosperity. The purpose of the trip is for the leaders to be "speaking with one voice," which reflects the collaborative and unified interest we share, and communicates to Capitol Hill through a community-wide show of force. Many elected officials from across the nation have witnessed this event and have commented on the effectiveness our region has had as a result of our visit. In fact, many are modeling our approach for their own regions.

The trip was not designed to align with the earmark request process, so, as such, is not included as part of the regional priority development process. Many individuals take advantage of the trip to inform their delegates and other congressional leaders of their interests related to federal programs and potential earmarks.

Everyone involved in the PDAC process must understand that advocacy is part of his or her job. It is incumbent on each participant to speak with one voice for the region and for the process. For that to happen, everyone involved must understand the process. To ensure this, the following are recommended:

- a) The process should be reinforced throughout the year. Individuals should be recognized for their service, projects should be celebrated for their contribution to regional success, and the recipients of funding should be accountable for the investment of public dollars.
- b) Proposers should be educated about the criteria to ensure that projects which meet a majority of the criteria enter the process.
- c) Projects funded through the PDAC process should have very specific expectations. The recipients of public dollars should not see the reporting requirements as a burden but rather an opportunity to celebrate success.
- d) Projects that undergo the PDAC process and are funded with state or federal dollars should provide regular reports to the PDAC. These reports should be coordinated within the context of the PDAC process.
- e) Each project submitter, review panelist, member of the PDAC, and member of the Regional Leaders Forum has a responsibility to advocate for the process and, ultimately, the prioritized list created by the process.

6. Celebrating Success

Celebrating success is not an event, it is a mindset. Celebrating success is the foundation upon which we build communications, transparency, openness, and is the basis for follow-up and accountability.

- a) As part of effective communication, successful projects should be highlighted when a new round of project review commences.
- b) The number of jobs created as a result of public investment must be tracked and reported.
- c) The impact on the tax-base must be determined and reported.
- d) Congressional staff must be kept informed and updated throughout the process.

Conclusion

The Review Committee found strong and widespread support for the current Priority Development and Advocacy Committee process in the community; however, there are many opportunities to improve the process— making the process more transparent and open, making funding recipients more accountable, and institutionalizing advocacy.

The recommendations above provide a framework to improve and strengthen the existing PDAC process.

APPENDIX A

Priority Development and Advocacy Committee

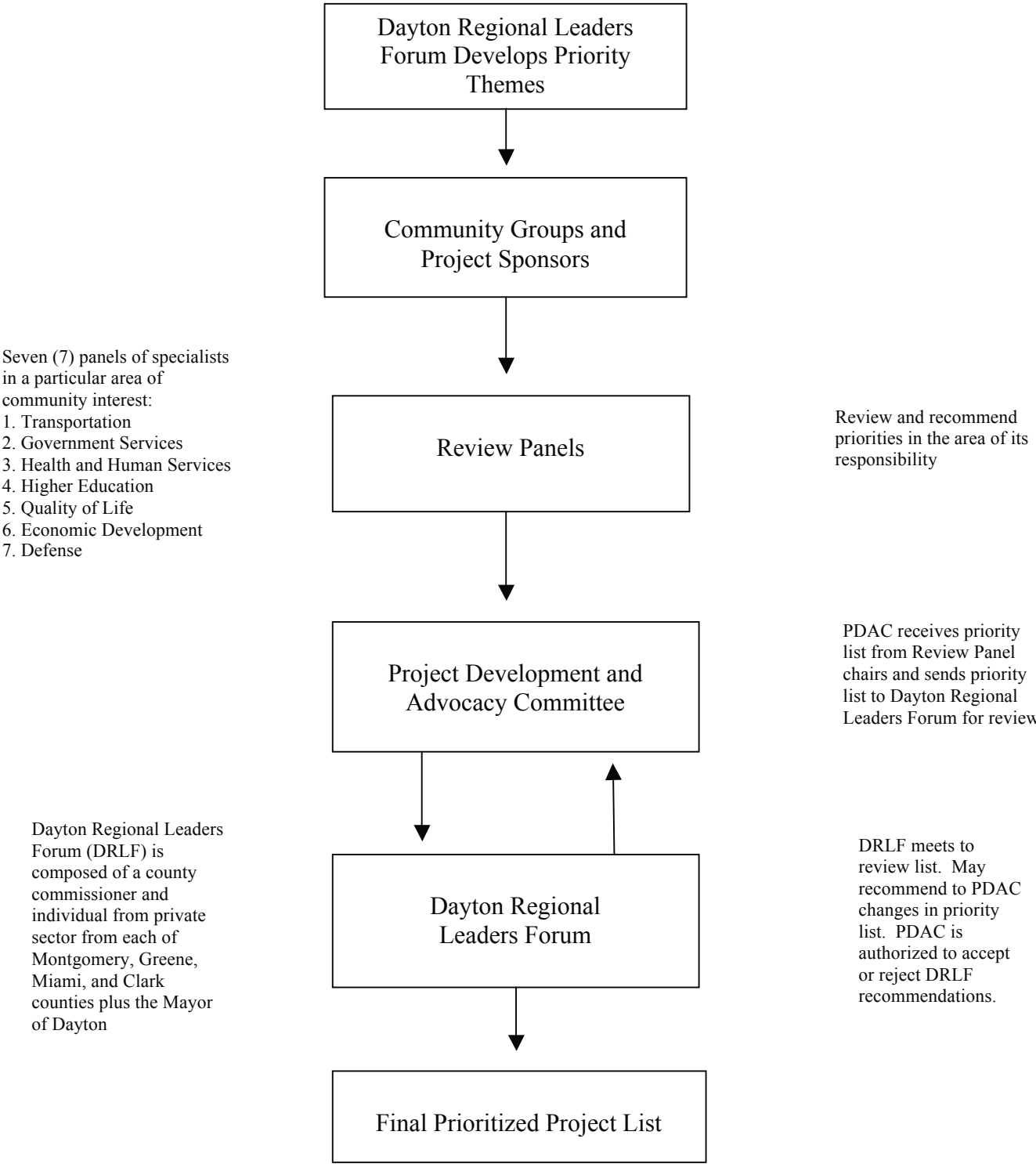
The PDAC process began as an outgrowth of regional lobbying on behalf of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base that now encompasses additional focus areas. It reflects a response to the need for broader community involvement in the selection of projects recommended to members of Congress for congressionally directed funding. The process is overseen by seven Review Panels in the following interest areas: transportation, government services, health and human services, higher education, quality of life, economic development, and defense. It is a comprehensive and detailed process complete with guidelines and criteria.

Members of Congress support directed funding for a variety of reasons. Among the reasons are job creation, community support, and an opportunity for the Member to make a difference for the community. The recent scrutiny of the earmark process has resulted in several reforms to the process to include:

1. a requirement for House member certification;
2. the inclusion of earmark sponsors in reports;
3. a reduction in the number and dollar value of earmarks;
4. the opportunity to remove earmarks on the House Floor.

The Dayton Development Coalition administers the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee process, which includes government and private sector proposals. The Coalition does not specifically represent any single project. Rather, the DDC works with members of the House and Senate to align the region's requests with the region's priorities.

PDAC Process Flow Chart



In a typical year, the time line for proposals is:

July/August 2009

**Dayton Regional Leaders Forum Develops
Priority Themes**

September 2009

The PDAC process is announced

- Press release
- E-mail blast
- Workshop offered

November 2009

Proposals are due

November/December 2009

Review Panels complete work

- Review Panels rank projects in priority order
- Chairs forward written report to Coalition

December/January 2010 Staff Evaluation of Project

January 2010

PDAC Meets

- Review Panel reports distributed
- PDAC receives oral reports from Review Panel representatives
- PDAC makes preliminary recommendations

January/February 2010

Dayton Regional Leaders Forum meets

- Dayton Regional Leaders Forum (DRLF) considers changes to PDAC recommendations
- PDAC meets again to consider DRLF feedback
- PDAC creates final recommendations

February 2010

Congressional forms submitted

- DDC sends project sponsors forms and instructions from Congressional offices on earmark submissions
- DDC answers questions on Congressional forms
- Project sponsors are responsible to file forms with Congressional offices
- DDC, Dayton Chamber of Commerce, and others meet one on one with Members to discuss top priorities
- Project sponsors and others contact Congressional offices to advocate on behalf of their project

April/May 2010

Washington Fly-in

APPENDIX B

Role of the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee

The role of the Priority Development and Advocacy Committee is to establish policy guidelines, facilitate the process, and maintain communication with all relevant parties. The Committee may limit the number of projects forwarded to the Congressional delegation. In selecting projects, the Committee will consider economic growth potential, regional character, regional character, cost-effectiveness, maturity, feasibility, impact, and support.